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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ALMATY NOTES, AUGUST 18 - 29, 2008

¶1. The "Almaty Notes" series is intended to maintain focus on developments in civil society, the media, and the opposition in Kazakhstan's "southern capital" following the move of the Embassy to Astana.

Nurlan Alimbekov Released

¶2. On July 31, a Shimkent court issued a ruling ordering the release of Nurlan Alimbekov from confinement. The court also suspended the criminal case against Alimbekov until he recovers from his alleged mental illness. Alimbekov was originally arrested in August 2007 on charges of inciting inter-ethnic hatred in messages he had disseminated via e-mail. He was subsequently confined in Shimkent and Almaty pre-trial facilities, the Almaty Republican Psychiatric Hospital, and the Aktas Special Regime Hospital. The court ruled that Alimbekov must go through obligatory outpatient treatment under supervision of a psychiatrist. The Kazakhstan Bureau for Human Rights in its own report on the case contended that the court ruling was not a verdict of "not guilty," as Alimbekov's status as a "political madman" has not been altered.

OSDP to Boycott Senate Elections

¶3. The opposition National Social Democratic Party (OSDP) has refused to participate in the upcoming elections to the Kazakhstani Senate. "We do not intend to attach the appearance of competition to this upcoming farce," OSDP leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbay said in an interview with the Taszhargan weekly on August 28. For the first time, senators are to be elected by oblast and city maslikhats (i.e., legislative bodies), where 85 per cent of deputies are members of the ruling Nur Otan political party. According to Tuyakbay, never before have elections been so predetermined and voting so senseless. "It is obvious that representatives of parties other than Nur Otan can get into the Senate only as a result of secret agreements and cynical bargaining," Tuyakbay contended.

Zhukeyev Criticizes Russia

¶4. Tulegen Zhukeyev, General Secretary of the Azat opposition party, made a statement denouncing the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia. Zhukeyev believes that this decision will undermine RussiaN President Medvedev's reputation. "This action of our northern neighbor will bring no good to Kazakhstan," Zhukeyev maintained, arguing that unambiguous and firm support of territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders should be the principles that guide Kazakhstan.

Housing Issues

¶5. Almaty residents are setting up a "people's council" to defend their right to housing, the leader of the Talmas movement, Aynur

Kurmanov, said in an interview with the *Vremya* daily on August 27. According to Kurmanov, this is a grass-roots decision initiated by citizens in order to prevent evictions and demolitions.

¶6. In Almaty's new Alatau district, the authorities have demolished more than 100 houses and are trying to prevent new illegal home construction, *KhabaR* TV reported on August 22. However, new illegally-built houses constantly reappear in place of the demolished ones. Until now, the authorities have failed to cope with the problem, the deputy head of the Alatau government administration, Kayrat Abdibekov, complained.

¶7. The press reported that the management of the "Verniy KZ" construction company embezzled \$20 million from 220 Almaty residents who had put up money for the company to build homes for them. With a view toward compensating the residents, the police have seized the assets of the company's founder, but no one has been arrested in the case thus far.

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